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Literature as a Socio-Spatial Diagnosis Tool. Reporting the Dominant Emotions of the *Città Diffusa* of the Italian North-East Through Novels and Testimonies

Olga Tzatzadaki*

Abstract: This paper argues on the use of narration (written and oral) as a socio-spatial diagnosis tool for urban studies. Throughout the use of literary work and the authors' oral testimonies, we can deepen our knowledge on the dynamics of urban space and how this space is being related to the individual. In order to understand these dynamics, we need "bottom – up" tools for the interpretation of the urban space, that are born from inside the society itself. In order to respond to the needs of a particular society in urban planning, we need to know as much as possible about this society, and the authors inside of it, can reveal many of its hidden dimensions. The paper continues in reporting some of the results of a research done in the Italian North-East Region with the collaboration of four contemporary Italian authors of the Region. Through their novels and personal testimonies, we tried to understand what are the dominant emotions of an individual living in these territories, in relation to the space of the diffused city but also in relation to the local society. A particular mention to the emotion of fear is being reported entirely from the research.

Keywords: narration, emotions, città diffusa, fear, malaise

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Narration as a socio-spatial diagnosis tool

Narration and Sociology

The relation between sociology and narration has always been debated and questioned, from the very birth of the first one. Sociology, from the very beginning, tried to establish itself as a science, based on specific argumentation and well-defined laws, following the methodologies of natural sciences and their scientific patterns of argumentation (Mills, 1995). The founding fathers of the discipline, tried to distinguish their learning from other contiguous forms of knowledge (including literature), and to qualify sociology as a science, which required them to define a specifically sociological method (Longo, 2015). A profound distinction between sociology and literary resources took place with the passing of time. As a result, a rich source of information about human relationships and society was overlooked, but also, as Turnaturi suggests, the whole individual front was left uncovered, and with that also the particular, the emotional front, sensitivity and culture, who are considered the territory of literature, an alien territory in which, however, it was possible to make hasty and rapacious incursions (Turnaturi, 2003). Nevertheless, a great number of scholars and researchers have used and until today use literary resources for their analysis, in order to explore the not obvious, the “possible realities” (Schutz, 1962a; Turnaturi, 2003). In this chapter, we will have a brief overview of only some of a great number of authors and scholars who worked on this subject, as well as their argumentation.

During the birth of Sociology, its founding fathers, like Comte, Durkheim, Weber and Simmel, used literary resources in order to interpret the world around them, guided by a profound desire to deeply understand the world and social phenomena. The Chicago school, for the first three decades of the twentieth century, viewed the city as a great social laboratory and studied urban phenomena ethnographically. A new method of doing research was introduced through participant observation practice, forming and legitimizing popular culture. During those years, fascinating research on metropolitan life was produced, novels, stories, legends and purely urban folk songs (Turnaturi, 2003). The sociologists of Chicago felt a particular attraction towards the kind of literature that made the city the center, and not the background, of its own narrative. There was a desire to uncover as many as possible hidden aspects of everyday life, not only the real and obvious, and that was exactly what literary resources offered them. Peter E. Park and Ernest W. Burgess publish in 1921 their *Introduction to the Science of Sociology*, one of the first handbooks on the discipline and later on, Florian Znaniecki publish in 1934 his methodological monograph, *The Method of Sociology*; both agreed that literature produces images of social settings, social types and social situations, which, although free of the rigorous presentations of reality which one ex-

pects from sociology, is nonetheless useful as a preliminary access to human relations and society (Longo, 2015, p. 55-56).

It was Lewis A. Coser, however, the first to propose, in a systematic way, the use of literature as a tool for teaching sociology. He suggests in *Sociology through literature* (1963) that literature has the ability to represent social reality, customs, types, relationships, and therefore that it is “sociologically productive” (Longo, 2012). A story is more memorable than an argument: we can use a literary image to make a concept clearer or to illustrate a certain social type with an example (Jedlowski, 2010, p. 18). However, according to Coser, sociology tends to neglect the recourse to literature as a source, perhaps because of the initial attempt to certify its “scientificity” to itself and to the academic world. According to Longo (2012, p. 17), Coser’s contribution on the subject is not only the idea of it as a precious tool for the simplification of the sociologist’s ideas, but above all as a starting point for the arrangement of sociological knowledge, and therefore, from a structured but not systematic knowledge of social reality.

Alfred Schutz’s in his essays, he analyses Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* and his “multiple realities” (1962a), or else, the utility of literary sources: that of stimulating and training the “sociological imagination” (Mills, 1995). As Longo (2015) suggests, Schutz’s essay is a clear example of a kind of theoretical argument in which literature functions as a stimulus, confirming and strengthening a well-defined theoretical approach. *Don Quixote* is seen by Alfred Schutz as a metaphor for the social actor, and even of the human being as one who is “enclosed in everyday reality as in a prison, and tortured by the most cruel jailer: the common sense reason which is conscious of its limits” (1964, p. 157). According to Longo, with his paper, Schutz, shows that he is much more than the refined analyst of the *taken for granted*, of common sense and of the everyday life-world; in his work, *Don Quixote* becomes the symbol of the human condition. Therefore, the reference to Cervantes’s novel is not a rhetorical strategy for making the theoretical question of multiple realities more appealing, but rather an illustrative mode of demonstrating the fragility of the bond that links social actors’ existences. Schutz’s essay is a clear example of a kind of theoretical argument in which literature functions as a stimulus, confirming and strengthening a well-defined theoretical approach (Longo, 2015, p. 115).

Wolf Lepenies, later on, in 1985, with his book *Die drei Kulturen. Soziologie zwischen Literatur und Wissenschaft* - translated into English in 1988 as *Between Literature and Science: The Rise of Sociology* - describes the relationship between literature and social science. Even if today sociology and literature constitute two distinct genres, the situation was different in the 1800s. A social scientist was supposed to write well, and authors of fiction were often very interested in society, to the point of sometimes viewing themselves as

social scientists. His work is a demonstration that the history of sociological thought is the history of the process of differentiation of sociology from literature. Alessandro Dal Lago, who introduces to the reader the text of Lepenies (1987), writes that it's a conflict about two different ways of telling the truth to the world and not about two ways of describing the world. In short, the conflict between sociology and literature appears to be the clash between two claims of cultural authority (Dal Lago, 1987, p. 14). This conflict finds its own sociological solution, in the moment in which one turns to literature as a specific field of investigation. In this case, the sociologist turns to literature as the object of his own analysis. Literature provides a constitutively other view of reality than that proposed by sociology: a fictitious representation that, however, offers the reader, within the many styles and literary genres, images of reality more attentive to detail, perhaps more accurate, however different from the sociological ones (Longo, 2012, p. 94). In fact, the novel can say and suggest many things to the sociologist because it remains fiction, as long as it remains anchored to its universe of discourse, to its rhetoric and conventions and doesn't make itself deliberately "sociology" (Turnaturi, 2003). As Pierre Bourdieu, the famous French sociologist and philosopher who wrote about this debate, "it is natural that sociologists should not expect to compete with writers. They would easily risk being "naive writers", due to ignorance of the needs and potential accumulated and inscribed in the very logic of the literary field" (1992, p. 162).

Berger writes in *Robert Musil and the rescue of the self* (1992): "Great writers may not be good at offering theories and explanations, but at least they can see. And the description, after all, is an act of sight. It may therefore be that literature, and especially that specifically modern form of literature that is the novel, can actually offer the best guide for defining modern western individuality" (Berger, 1992). As Paolo Jedlowski, one of the major Italian contributors on the subject, suggests, the novel is like a source for understanding the common sense of a place and of a time (2010, p. 27), where by "common sense" we mean that set of interpretations of reality that are taken for granted within a date social circle (Schutz, 1962b). And Jedlowski continues: "the novel makes us aware of what was previously perceived only confusedly [...] after the novel, the behavior is recognized and categorized, found - so to speak - citizenship in reality" (Jedlowski, 2010, p. 27-28). All this contributes to our understanding of reality but not only; literature gives representations on the basis of which the members of the narrative communities, in which it takes place, can understand it, and on the basis of which they can also understand themselves (ibidem, p. 29). What literature offers us is the description of people, facts, places, that is "how", while sociology deals with "why", with explanation (Turnaturi, 2003, p. 29). What comes into the narrative is the result of a social process of significant selection, and this tells us a lot about

the society and culture that produces them and keeps them current (Levorato, 1988, p. 27; Poggio, 2004, p. 31).

Nevertheless, there is a clear distinction between literature and social sciences: literary and scientific discourses are distinguishable by virtue of the *communicative pact* that defines them (Jedlowski, 2010, p. 17). It's a particular communicative pact between author and reader: the latter is obliged not to ask himself whether what is narrated in the story is true or false (Eco, 1976, p. 70). The reader must know that what is told to him is an imaginary story. The author pretends to make a true statement. We accept the fictional pact and pretend that what he says really happened (Eco, 2000, p. 92). On the other hand, Richard Rorty, in his famous debate with Umberto Eco (1995), suggests that we will never know what a text is all about: "it is wrong to think that there is something of which a text really treats, something that will be revealed by the rigorous application of a method". The critic betrays the work he plans to interpret. The work itself, regardless of the subject that perceives it, is a simple chimera. However, Eco replies, a text is not a "picnic" where the author brings the words and the readers the sense. The text - suggests Eco - is an object constructed by interpretation in the circular effort to validate itself on the basis of what constitutes its own result. Exactly like in a detective story: where the author makes the killer spread clues that allow the detective to find out; or maybe like in the story of Tom Thumb that leaves the breadcrumbs to be found. In the description, it's the collaboration between reader-text that stimulates the imagination, while in a text of sociology the description is already too detailed to leave room for imagination (Eco, 2002). It is precisely for this that the literary text is used: to imagine. This communicative pact for Jedlowski is very important: narrative fiction cannot be taken entirely to the word, or else, the communicative pact would be misunderstood (2010, p. 23).

Literature builds "stories as true" (Turnaturi, 2003, p. 16), in other words, stories that even when they realistically describe the world, they do it in a fictitious way. On the contrary, the burden of proof lies with the sociologist. The sociologist must be able to clarify not only the identity of his sources, but also to answer questions of a procedural, technical, as well as theoretical nature (Longo, 2012, p. 91). While narrating reality, the sociologist does so to explain/understand the world (Sparti, 1995; Fornari, 2002; Longo, 2012): its narration is therefore always functionalized. The sociological interest for reality is mediated by the reference to theoretical concepts and/or research procedures that condition observation, preventing the sociologist to read the data in its uniqueness, in this case as a tool to achieve sociological efficient generalizations (Longo, 2012, p. 93).

However, the fact that the reader is not obliged to ask himself if the story is true or not, makes the literary story much freer: it does not need real ref-

erences. The narrator can describe different worlds, realistic or imaginary, always fictitious and, free from the burden of proof, which maybe is the underlying reason for the fascination that literature exercises on readers, including sociologists. What matters, for the question of the relationship between literary narration and sociology, is the plastic capacity of literature to produce representations of reality as if they were true (Turnaturi, 2003, p. 16), which explains in part why the sociologist can address them as a source (of data, but also for inspiration).

The ability to give a fictitious representation to reality is one of the reasons for the success of the narration. Guido Borelli, writes about this characteristic of literature in his essay *Through the mainstream of community studies: identities, places and representations* (2016), commenting on a review by Mauro Portello (2014) for *Cartongesso*, a novel by Francesco Maino: “Cartongesso reverses the traditional relationship between reality and literature: the representation of everyday life that flows at Insaponata di Piave is fiction that produces reality, not the other way around. It is a reality that is increasingly rapacious towards fiction because it is coerced by the endless contingencies to be clung to: the wardrobe communities of Bauman with their puzzle identities, the ‘unlikely bedfellows’ of Tschumi”.

We read in the review by Portello:

“If anything, it is a matter of understanding to what extent that reality has brought about this tragedy, it is necessary to disturb the *real* to pull it out, to flush it out, to urticate it, to bother it, if not, it doesn’t reply, it limits itself to being watched and observed, to being described and coaxed, and to being ignored: this is what Maino did, or rather Tessari (the two of course must be kept distinct), he has disturbed the *real* in order to unveil to the world this Waste Land. Because it is a fictional construction, the instance that moves it is not informative: fiction subsumes reality. The Veneto, this crazy Veneto, in *Cartongesso* is a precise dimension of its dramaturgical construction. The point is this: it is the fiction of the novel that governs the reality data and not the opposite”.

In fact, this freedom and autonomy of literature is perhaps the clearest difference between sociology and literature: the literary story is not bound to presuppositions of a theoretical and methodological nature and it is probably for this reason that it appears, despite its fictional nature, together more consistent and adequate with respect to the reality represented (Longo, 2012, p. 114). Recognizing these differences is essential for a conscious use of literature as a source.

The city through the eyes of the other

We mentioned above the work of Schutz on the “possible realities”. Mizzau (1998) suggests that narrative can make us go beyond what is said in the

treatises of psychology or linguistics and to show us something not contemplated by scientific discipline. We need the contribution of literature precisely because it illuminates many points of view, many hypotheses, many different worlds and helps us to have a more complete view of a given space-time reality, an operation that can not always be obtained from quantitative and purely scientific analysis. As Turnaturi suggests, the coexistence of so many possible worlds makes the gaze of those who study the most acute social processes (Turnaturi, 2003, p. 20). The most fantastic stories can be used as metaphors to talk about dimensions of reality that are noticeably graspable but not “unreal”: of emotions, feelings or intuitions that otherwise would only remain obscurely perceptible (Jedlowski, 2010, p. 26). The exploration of urban emotions is another contribution of literature. In particular, film narrative according to Ezio Marra (2008), is a popular *medium* to understand how the city is represented in the collective imagination, as cinema occupies an important part in our historical memory that characterizes our identity built through emotions. (Marra, 2008). Literature in this way is also a trainer for cultivating empathy, the necessary but overlooked ingredient for urban planning; a kind of planning in which people can reach the best of their capabilities.

Another contribution of literature concerns the illumination of the singular, the dissimilar, not only of the universal and the general, of which the social sciences are concerned. What literature does, Turnaturi writes, is to make visible types of characters and situations of everyday reality, which we come to know only through the literary text. Literature brings out figures, processes and social relationships and highlights behavior; thus it helps us in the formation of analytic categories, with characteristics enriched by the literary work (Turnaturi, 2003).

Howard Becker, in a report on the *Invisible Cities* of Italo Calvino, writes that the analysis of the cities by sociologists are precise, systematic but sufficiently abstract to allow the creation of analytical classifications and typologies, while Calvino describes descriptions of desires, fears, emotions, and the states of mind that cities create. These “insignificant details” offer an extraordinary contribution to the study of cities, “to understand the nature of a city, of how it is made, to grasp its culture” (Becker, 2000). Becker continues:

“Every detail could be, for the shrewd reader, the springboard for the analysis of an area of urban life. (...) The well-defined concepts of social scientists produce well-defined results. The literary description renounces this possibility of clarity and unidimensionality in favor of the ability to make multiple analyzes and multiple possibilities contained in a story”.

We need narration in order to be able to reach as many realities as possible in our cities. To try to restore a high quality of life equally distributed to

the entire population, we must get to know as much detail as possible about the individuals who inhabit an urban space, and these cannot be provided only by their testimonies, but by that acute look of the writer who illuminates these worlds. The feeling of the places and all the details on the emotions of those who live in an urban space is delivered by the literary work and the stories of the writers and, thanks to these, we come to the knowledge of hidden worlds and of the way the weakest subjects of the population receive the world. After all, Literature exposes the single hidden thoughts of different people; a very precious material for the curious researcher of the social world, who aims in understanding not only the general, but also the particular, the single cases of the society. Studying the particular is an act of inclusion, necessary for the discipline.

According to Turnaturi, the knowledge of different worlds helps us to open up to the other, to “come out” of ourselves and to see the world through the eyes of the other: “Through literature we can look at men not only in their daily affairs, but to put it in Proust, to see them as “giants in time”. Literature opens our imagination and our judgment on what is far away, outside the particularistic circle, to the unknown and to the different”.

Literary imagination is “an essential component of an ethical position that asks us to worry about the good of other people whose lives are far from ours” (Nussbaum, 1996). This means that what we take for granted and the solutions we seek to respond to the daily problems of cities, perhaps are not suitable for everyone, at least for those who think the world in ways other than ours. If, as planners, we must create environments based on the true needs of the local community, literature invites us to look at the world through the eyes of another person and from a position that is not ours. The desire to know the different worlds and to take them all into consideration is a necessary task if we want to build a city for everyone and not for a single part of society. Turnaturi suggests (2003, p. 45):

“The novel shows us the needs of individuals, their desires, the particular conditions of their conditions of life. (...) What is underlined in this perspective is that the resources which each individual needs are different not only quantitatively but also qualitatively. Even with this type of approach we get to the definition of models and measures, but these measures are not homogeneous, and different in quality”.

Thinking about the creation of public policies for the orientation of the development of a territory in which no one feels excluded is the main task of planners, and literature not only teaches us this fact, but helps us to have more tools and data possible in order to be able to respond to this need. Narration, therefore, helps us to interpret different realities and puts us in constant questioning with ourselves and with others in order to make sure that we are always flexible and ready to listen to the different needs of each

member of the society. According to Martha Nussbaum, Turnaturi suggests, literary imagination is an essential part and a source both for theory and for practices of social justice, for theory and for the practice of citizenship (Nussbaum, 1996). In this sense, we can hypothesize that these new theories of social justice are indebted to literature, to literary imagination, to a gaze that focuses on the individual, to tell a specific and concrete case at the same time and to question certainties and classificatory formulas. “An ethic of impartial respect for human dignity would fail to engage real human beings if not enabling them to enter the imagination of the lives of distant people and to experience emotions connected with participation” (Nussbaum, 1996, p. 14). It is the enhancement of individuality, not at the expense of the common good but on the contrary to optimize it, which emphasizes Nussbaum commenting on the contribution of the literary work *Hard Times* by Charles Dickens. Nussbaum notes: “A history of the quality of human life without the stories of individual human actors would be too indeterminate to show the mechanism by which resources actually determine the various types of human activity” (Nussbaum, 1996, p. 92). As Leonie Sandercock (2011) underlines “a better understanding of the work that stories do can make us better planners in at least three ways: by expanding our practical tools, by sharpening our critical judgment and by widening the circle of democratic discourse”.

Sociology and literature suggest that the city is a state of mind (Park, 1999). The city is a moral, spiritual and mental environment, even before it is spatial: it is a sociological event and not just a spatial event (Turnaturi, 2003, p. 92). Weber and Simmel look to the city as a “spatially formed sociological event”. Turnaturi suggests that the scholars of the school of Chicago looked to the city as a great “social laboratory”, as the sociological phenomenon par excellence that is produced, and reproduces incessantly, thanks to an interaction between individuals made possible by the city itself. What literature offers us is to understand how people feel and live in an urban space, their experience in it, and this is what makes its study necessary for those involved in cities and public policies.

Literature offers us the essence of a city. For sociologists and writers the essence of a city is differently defined. For Italo Calvino, the city is a desire, a producer of desires, a notion born with the making of the capitalistic metropolis (Turnaturi, 2003, p. 99). This idea was already identified by Georg Simmel in his work *The metropolis and mental life*. All this shows us that the urban space, the city, is not only a material construction but above all a sociological event, a state of mind, a series of feelings of its inhabitants and as such must be addressed and studied. Narration helps us to complete the puzzle of feelings identified in an urban space, a job hardly obtainable from other sources of analysis.

How?

Homo loquens is the empirical sociologist's subject: it is a subject to listen to, to question, to whom to address, depending on the methodological approach chosen, detailed questions, structured on the basis of predefined options, or suggestions on topics of wider discussion. However, language is the starting point for the empirical analysis of social reality, also because language is one of the main materials that make up society. In this way, the sociologist has mostly to do with narrative sources, with stories, reports, representations of reality provided by the subjects (Longo, 2012, p. 95).

Longo (ibidem) suggests that the qualitative narration has a different nature with respect to the narrative fragments found in a questionnaire that is often used: it thickens in itself the characters of the daily story, proposes events, feelings, aspirations and connects them within a logic that is more bound to strategies narratives of the interviewee than it is to the theoretical and methodological reasons of the researcher. Whether it is a sense built in the interaction between the researcher and the interviewee, or emerging from a predefined set of already structured questions, it is the *homo loquens* that provides the scientist, in the last instance, images of the real through multiple forms (more or less dense, more or less free, more or less structured) of the narration and the story. By selecting and relating, the narrator provides meaning to reality and, at the same time, gives it order: by narrating, giving meaning to experience, we order it by structuring meaningful sequences of events, linking those events to a logically coherent structure, in line with what of reality we already know (Longo, 2006, p. 14).

Carlin notes that according to sociologist Harvey Sacks (Carlin, 2010), only direct observation of a social context can produce sociological descriptions. When this happens, the sociologist describes reality from observational data. Where it is not possible, for a series of reasons, to attract direct observation, it is possible to resort to other sources (for example narrative ones). In this case we start a complex process that coincides with the sociological reconstruction of the text used. Sacks employs the idea of sociological reconstruction to illustrate the analysis that Weber proposes of ancient Judaism (Longo, 2012).

When the sociologist uses an exogenous source (for example, literary), he does not generally do so with the intent of including that source in the corpus of sociological texts. In fact, that source lacks the specific characters to be included theoretical and methodological references, for example, but also a particular language, references to the scientific community, etc.). It is used instead with practical purposes: either as a substitute for observation, when reality is not directly accessible, or as a stimulus to the imagination of the sociologist. In both cases, the possibility of a sociological use of the (literary) text does not depend on some intrinsic quality that qualifies it as sociologically significant, but on the specific cognitive objectives that the sociologist

places and justifies the selection of that text. In any case, it is not an attempt to qualify as texts those that are not recognized as sociological, but it is a matter of giving a momentary sociological value to a text that otherwise would not have (Longo, 2012).

As Jedlowski (2010), notes though, using the novel as a source for social research requires a great deal of caution: it is a complementary form, valuable for certain elements that are otherwise unavailable, but which must be supported by some comparison with different sources. He suggests that “understanding the role of narratives in the processes of social construction of reality requires the comparison of multiple texts, the study of their production conditions, of the network of interlocutions in which they are inserted, of the ways in which they criticize each other, of their circulation and the ways in which they are received, of the formation of the various narrative communities within which they are received” (ibidem, p. 30). Also, we must have in mind that literary sources are not able to provide the social researcher with quantitative data about social phenomena of a measurable kind (Laslett, 1976; Kuzmics, 2001). Robert Nisbet, with his essay *Sociology as an art form* (1962), noted the “technicalization” of sociology and that the methods of empirical research based on a statistical nature, tend, if absolute, to impoverish the discipline, reducing its capacity to grasp social reality and to provide adequate explanations. And as Longo argues (2015) the objective of sociology cannot be the sole acquisition of quantitative knowledge of social phenomena, in other words of demographic or statistical sources. He also agrees that, when referring to literary works in order to represent reality from a theoretical point of view, a sociologist “depends in this enterprise on the novelist” (Elias, 1970; 2001) as a sort of co-author. The resulting theoretical interpretation is the output of the combined efforts of both the novelist and the sociologist (Longo, 2015).

From this conscious use of exogenous sources, sociology can not but benefit: it shows its vitality as a discipline, shows its ability to explain reality, and this without necessarily referring to increasingly sophisticated research techniques. It also demonstrates its ability to integrate narratives with their strong cognitive imprint, while maintaining its own identity. With this use, sociology brings into play its discourses, its concepts, but also the depth of its methodological acquisitions. It demonstrates the cognitive openness of the discipline and also, the ability to respond to new challenges (Longo, 2012).

Discussion

As a conclusion on this discussion, we can only agree with the words of Tzvetan Todorov that literature is preparatory to the training of human scientists:

“Is there a better introduction for understanding human behaviors and feelings, if not to immerse oneself in the work of writers who have been dedicated to this task for thousands of years? [...] So what better preparation for all professions based on human relationships? If literature is understood in this way and its teaching is oriented in this way, what more valuable help could the future student of law, or of political science, the future social worker or whom that is involved in psychotherapy, the historian or the sociologist?” (2007, p. 81-82).

As complimentary, we would like to express a thought on this debate. A “brainstorming” is a creative process, in order to solve a problem or to create good ideas on a subject. In this process, everyone is free to express even the most peculiar of ideas, without constraints, because often, rational thinking “blocks” solutions. These ideas, who come out from a spontaneous-thinking pattern, can lead us to solutions never thought before or discover paths of thinking so accurately hidden that only an “out-of-the-box” approach can deliver. Literary work and narration, who is free to express ideas without the oblige of proof, may be like a brainstorming process, which could, with further elaborations, lead to knowledge and solutions on social problems that couldn’t be generated by other ways. We need to be creative in order to be innovative, and to use tools that march together with the society and that are in a continuous dialogue with the latter. Literature, in this journey, can act like a “trigger” for innovation in our consolidated ways of studying society. We would dare to say that, during the effort of validating itself to the scientific world and of satisfying the latter, Sociology, perhaps overlooked a great “allied” and “friend”, Literature, which would have contributed immensely in exploring different paths of thinking and not only as a contribution to understanding society but also as a “predictor” of future issues so as to be prepared, if possible, in advance. We cannot but agree with Mariano Longo that the “*partial rationality* of sociology” (2012, p. 124) is a huge advantage of the latter and must be seen as richness and not as a “flaw”. Fast reflexes, adjustment and flexibility in our tools of understanding society are necessary today, in order to be able to respond to the new challenges of globalization.

Case-study: four contemporary Italian authors “diagnosing” socio-spatially the Italian North-East Region

A socio-spatial diagnosis of the diffused city (*città diffusa*)¹

Our intention in this research was to measure the “social cost” of the economic change who took place in the North-East Italian Region, and to

¹ All interviews have been made personally by the author, from June – September 2018, in the Italian North-East Region.

try to “measure” the “malaise” and the “well-being” of the inhabited space, as it has changed in the last forty years. To understand the inhabitant and his well-being, the relationship between sociology and design must be differentiated, which means putting people’s quality of life at the center and looking for alternatives and new paths; in order to do this, we must also deal with the sensations, the feelings experienced, not only with the characteristics, more or less reliable, that is, with something that must be concretely read, beyond the domain of what is measurable (Dobosz-Federici, 2018). This is precisely the contribution of literature in this analysis, because it offers us the “sensations” of the lived space and the feelings that the environment creates in the individual.

We need tools “not obvious”, oriented to identify those problematic issues that insist on the relationship between person and space (Dobosz-Federici, 2018, p. 44). Our tools, to understand the emotional impact of these places, were the stories of writers, both oral and written, as inhabitants, *flâneurs* and privileged witnesses of this reality. We thought of using the term - borrowed from architecture - “section”, horizontal and vertical, to show that we made a “cut” to see what happens within the elements identified: the territory and society. On one hand, the “horizontal section” consisted in seeing what has happened in the territory in the last forty years, while on the other, with the “vertical section”, we discovered interpersonal relationships, daily movements and their outcome.

Our analysis, on each element identified, was based first on a presentation of the phenomena from the scientific point of view and, then, we looked for a correspondence of these phenomena with the work and interpretations of the writers, so as to create a presentation of the phenomena that proceeds on two tracks. On one hand we had the testimonies of the writers, as “speaking subject” (*homo loquens*) in analysis, and on the other we tried to find how the novel exposes - in our opinion in a surgical way - these phenomena of the territory that have been studied also from the point of scientific / quantitative view. The writers taken into consideration were:

- a. Romolo Bugaro;
- b. Francesco Maino;
- c. Davide Tessari;
- d. Vitaliano Trevisan.

Our task was to identify the emotions of living spaces, as indicators of the quality of life in them. It is important, before any transformation of the territory, to take a step backwards, and try to compose a diagnosis of the wider and different problems that this territory presents; through this work we would like to arrive at this result, in other words to make a contribution for the diagnosis of the “diseases” of this territory, in order to make sure

that future “treatment interventions” are not fragmented, and that they have coherence of the whole.

In the “horizontal” section in particular, we tried to explore the relation between space and individual, in other words, the emotional impact of these spaces to the individual that is living in them. The writers were invited to talk about the urban space: the form, the design, the architecture, the aesthetics and the impact of it on the individual in terms of emotions. The results of the research talk about a form of the space that creates anxiety to the individual and imposes a stressful daily life and a model of life that does not contribute to his feeling of being a citizen; where citizenship means sharing, expression of participation, social life, active life. The citizen of the diffused city is not part of a “polis”, and this affects his living with people and the loss of community, which characterizes these places. It is interesting to note that through the narratives, the writers give us a wider sense of what the inhabitant feels of the territory and how the built environment becomes a reason for his “well-being” or “malaise” (habitation-public spaces-mobility-daily experience). Through the descriptions of the physical form of the spaces, the writers also testify certain characteristics of the local society and the psychological, emotional and social impact that creates this particular physical form on the individual.

The writers speak of an architecture that creates boredom, and almost, disgust, horror. The new buildings reflect a culture not their own, and their living seems to be very far from what the individual of these places perceives as familiar, hospitable. In all this, the social *status* is involved, which must be manifested through one’s own habitation. Living in a family environment is fundamental for the growth of the individual and his emotional well-being. It seems that what orients the design of spaces is not health, harmony and well-being but certain patterns of lifestyle, on which the individual must conform. In all this, prevails repetition and monotony, which influence his emotions and growth, in the long run.

A socio-spatial diagnosis of the diffused city - the “vertical” section

What we were interested in evaluating in the “vertical” section was the daily life of the individual, “where everyday life is at the same time the necessary relationship between man and the world and with other men” (Jedlowski, 1978, p. 11; Dobosz-Federici, 2018, p. 34). Our purpose here was to measure “well-being”, where “well-being” is a concept that has to do with not only economic but relational, cultural, environmental and housing resources, resources that concern the non-economic aspects of life, the so-called social and symbolic capitals. For many years, well-being and happiness have been measured on the basis of GDP (Gross Domestic Product), an indicator born at the end of the Second World War and used to date by every

country as a measure of prosperity, wellbeing and progress; it is an indicator of a purely economic nature, which indicates the total value of goods and services produced in a country in the course of a year, and intended for the consumption of the final purchaser, for private and public investments and exports (Dobosz-Federici, 2018). However, happiness and well-being cannot be measured on a purely economic basis; GDP is just one of several usable indicators. Every attempt to identify a system of indicators must be based on norms, values and priorities of those who participate in social life and must be continually reviewed in the light of the progress and changes of the city itself and, in any case, the selection of issues relevant to a community, can only take place “bottom-up”, from direct confrontation with citizens. Often, these indicators are socio-economic (poverty, employment, social exclusion), environmental (health, air quality, water and food, inhabited, social and cultural environment), and related to lifestyle and access to services (education, health system, transport, etc. (Dobosz-Federici, 2018).

Here too, for us, the indicators for measuring well-being were the emotions of the individuals who live in these places, and therefore of the writers, through their testimonies and stories. We tried to understand if the increase in GDP has contributed to the happiness of the individual in these territories and what has brought this change in their lives in terms of daily life, happiness, relational goods, fear and culture. What we were interested in evaluating here is the daily life of the individual, “where everyday life is at the same time the necessary relationship between man and the world and with other men” (Jedlowski, 1978, p. 11; Dobosz-Federici, 2018, p. 34). Life in these places should be viewed as an experience of everyday life, like a flow. As Jedlowski and Leccardi suggest in the text *Sociology of everyday life* (2003, p. 34): “It is impossible to think of everyday life in abstract terms outside the concreteness of the bodies and spaces they occupy. The reference to the materiality of existence refers in turn to the dimension of experiences: the subjects who populate daily life can not be put into a separate theme to the consideration of their own subjectivity, emotions, desires, fears and hopes that animate them”.

In this section, the emotions described mainly by the authors were about happiness, acceptance, contempt, trust and fear. We report in following the results about the emotion of fear, which is worth-mentioning in detail.

Fear as an indicator of malaise in the diffused city

Romolo Bugaro speaks of a fear linked to the impact that the diffused city has onto the individual, while Trevisan often quotes, in his works, the fear of the individual towards the different, the non-familiar and the fear concerning the continuous insecurity of losing what we possess materially;

not only, it is also a fear of losing one's status, losing recognition by society and becoming marginalized. As Castel suggests (2009): "Thus we see the multiplication of categories suffering from a lack of integration in relation to work, housing, education, culture, etc. and which can be said to be threatened with exclusion. Such processes of marginalization can then cause exclusion properly so-called, that is, an explicitly discriminatory treatment of these persons". Tessari comments:

"It is the fear of losing material things because others we don't have. We did not build high "hedges" around our children because we were busy working all day, so our children were free to experience the worst things; but the hedges around the house and the alarms everywhere, those, were set" (Tessari, interview to the author, Mira, 08-08-2018).

Money, once again, is the instrument necessary to guarantee an effective security and therefore an acceptable degree of existential tranquility (Bordoni, 2012, p. 93). Writers often spoke about the individual's effort to "protect themselves" through safer housing, with fences, with alarm systems and robust locks. They often spoke of a feeling of insecurity that does not just look at protection against the loss of material elements. The ability of money to reassure from fear is not just about the possibility of having insurance against accidents, against damage caused by bad weather, traffic accidents, the theft of valuables, having security doors and alarm systems and Suv (all the elements that money offers); money capacity offers security for maintaining one's status. Bugaro writes in *Bea Vita!* (2010): "Voting for the right is the only way to cope with the daily feeling of exclusion. They need to offer themselves the confirmation of being normal, cheerful, Western girls. Girls who go to the disco and drive the Matiz. They need to reinforce the banks and distance the fear".

Bugaro here mentions the fear of exclusion, of being marginalized and of the effort to have all the necessary characteristics to make sure that one's social status is quite recognizable. The marginalization, individual fear, is very present, almost immanent, in the current context, where it is considered almost ineliminable, as an inevitable consequence of the insecurity and fragility of the status reached by the average man, to be considered never definitive or established; risk free (Bordoni, 2012). We see, here, that marginalization is an aspect that concerns the economic conditions and, subsequently, the placement in the social hierarchy, and therefore of the status.

In our case study, initially, fear has been the driving force of the territory, which has "encouraged" the individual to "fight" for a better future, in which poverty, even as a word, is no longer present in the context. Maino gives his testimony:

“There was a fight against destiny that always wanted you poor and miserable. We wanted to remove the idea of poverty. The memory of poverty made people crazy. There was the terror of returning as we were, coupled with the rage of having to go against the fate that for centuries tells you that “you must stay under”. I remember my uncle telling me about an earl he worked for, who had lands, and invited them once a year to see him from a distance eating chicken, to remind them of who was in control, and they smelled the scent of the chicken; they had to remember that they were farmers and would always remain farmers, and if they had raised their heads, someone would have made them pay for it. Before this, the old bonds were broken and a new cosmic energy was released; an energy from a new geological era, like glaciation. This energy was stronger from the state, from the bureaucracy, from politics, therefore, the company rised without rules, the sheds are made “like this”, the territory, and the ecological problems are not present. The house was a laboratory. They worked twenty hours a day” (Maino, interview to the author, Mestre, 19-09-2018).

The fear of poverty has for decades motivated the individual to work without ever stopping, to be able to get out of the economic and social conditions that until then defined it and to move further and further away from the idea of old poverty. Over time, this fear has turned into a fear of losing a certain bourgeois lifestyle. To alienate oneself, in the proper sense of becoming something else, no longer recognizing oneself and not being recognized by others, is not only a mental illness, but an induced existential condition, which is becoming common for many individuals in the globalized world. Not recognizing and not being recognized means, for most people, not existing, that is to say, denying one’s dignity as a human being (Bordoni, 2012). Bugaro writes (2010): “Used to the centrality, they resist very little like half-sided figures among the people. (...) Being on the market is difficult, it doesn’t take much to fall. (...) The advent of the difficulty provokes an immediate reaction. (...) In the air there is a vague over-excitement, as if the danger made everyone more alive, quicker and more aware”.

The fear of “falling” socially, as Bugaro writes, also explains the corrosion of the character. Fear becomes stronger than ethical values and can eliminate the value system of the individual. A continuous feeling of fear of loss of status causes the individual to often sacrifice his values in order to have a certain social status. Work becomes a means of having certain consumption capacities, which leads to a specific social category and automatically defines the status of the individual. Work, a socially useful activity necessary for one’s own livelihood, has immediately adapted to the “perverse” process dictated by the sublimation of fatigue through compensatory consumption, which translates into the enduring of a repetitive, tiring and unsatisfactory activity in exchange for the opportunity to access market consumption,

thanks to the conventional mediation of money; perverse, because it is market consumption that becomes the main motivation for work and not its opposite (Bordoni, 2012). Gorz notes: “The “compensatory consumption” originally proposed to the workers to let them accept the functionalization of the work, become the aim in view of which the functional work is sought by the non-workers: the goods and services of the market are no longer desired as compensation for work functional; we want to get some functional work to be able to pay for market consumption” (Gorz, 2011, p. 58).

If the ability to spend is the factor that determines the placement of the individual in the social hierarchy, then the acquisition of certain goods and brands of prestige, causes the individual to “feel” that belonging to a social class higher than his, even if it is not, in fact, his own. Bugaro continues (2010):

“Stopped in front of the windows of Dev, apprenticeships or cocopro² or contract-free girls look at the € 1,950 bags, the € 675 shoes, the € 240 gloves. (...) A bag is worth double, triple their salary. A padded coat means six months of work. (...) Living in the family allows you to breathe. They have savings. Five thousand, ten thousand euros. By accepting the idea of extreme effort, the jackets and bags of Dev could be within their reach”.

Fear is being translated, however, also in other ways with which the individual has built his life. The constant insecurity of losing what has been gained, has led to an isolation of the individual. The price to pay is not only economic, but also social and psychological, since isolation from the surrounding world often results in a separation from the community of origin. Because the greatest risk from this insecure society is an exasperated individualization, an unhealthy solitude, the breaking of informal social relationships and a net loss of social capital, that is, of that precious cultural baggage that is formed thanks to the processes of personal interrelation and it is based on mutual trust (Bordoni, 2012, p. 94). Trevisan writes in *Tristissimi Giardini* (2010):

“And those few children never go out to play on the street! I’m afraid they’re already formatted at least as much as the gardens. Of course, this feeling of security gives you to think: the three youngest families seem to be those who are more afraid! Fear or not, these modernizations always tend to isolate, not only in the sense of thermodynamics, the interior from the outside, even visually. And if I suffered when, as a child, my mother confined me to the garden, the more I would have suffered if I could not at least be able to look out through the fence, or play through, something now impossible for these children, isolated

² Project contract or project collaboration contract, in Italian labor law legislation, from 2003 to 2015.

in claustrophobic gardens. They limit the sight, this more than anything else annoys me. A garden, however small, is a blessing. To prevent its sight, limiting it, especially if it is small, means preventing any interaction - dialogue, with the outside. This ridiculous privacy craze! Even assuming a scary point of view, the idea of not being able to see outside worries me much more than being seen; nor does it occur to me what I could do in the garden so private that it would be necessary to isolate it from view”.

Trust in informal relationships today tends to be considered as a source of virtual concerns, if not disturbance and even possible, damage. A further risk to avoid with little effort, in the belief that, with the same self-preservation, of allowing oneself to trust one another, at the same time an individual benefit is obtained; instinctively valued for its own benefit and perceived as “healthy selfishness”, it proves an irreparable loss, because it isolates and dries up. This benefit not only provokes a sense of frustration and disposes to depression, but fuels aggression towards the other. Unjustified aggression, produced by a mixture of frustration, depression and insecurity, is the inescapable sign of the threshold of incivility, the loss of social bonds, so laboriously built up by centuries of civilization, is now being overcome (Bordoni, 2012). Precious privacy is, at the same time, that reason that causes us to isolate ourselves from the rest of the world, making individuals safer and less “threatened”. In a community, however, where there is no trust between individuals and where interpersonal relationships are consequently weakened, it is more of an “individualistic” type, with a very weak network of relationships. The low density of the diffused city and the isolation of the individual in safe housing but “closed” in themselves, has contributed to the loss of social interaction, and therefore of solidarity.

In particular, David Weil, in his work *Economic Growth* (2007), argues that one of the most important factors for the economic growth of a country is social capital, understood as the value of the network of relationships between people, as mutual support in the carrying out their duties. Social capital is high when there is trust among people, while it is low when there is no habit of helping those we do not know. Social capital offers economic benefits (solidarity and mutual aid) while improving the functioning of the government (people are concerned with voting members from their own community). Furthermore, public administration is more efficient where social capital is high. All this indicates social capacity and therefore the ability of a community to seize the best from the opportunities presented to it. We can therefore imagine that a local society with a low social capacity, in reality, moves more slowly, is less effective in solving its problems and can lose many opportunities for development. Weil also notes that one of the determining factors of social capacity is population density: densely populated

areas have more active governments and a much stronger administrative experience, which is crucial for faster development. In other words, in the diffused city, the low density together with the “isolation” of housing, due to insecurity and fear, results in a low social capacity, which turns out to be an “obstacle”, not only for new opportunities development that may emerge, but also for making the actions of the public administration more efficient. It could be said that the high social capital, which the North-East Region had forty years ago, was the one that “fueled” the development of the early years, while, over time, this capital diminished.

The fear, moreover, often cited by the authors in their works, is that towards the “different”. Bordoni writes (2012, p. 83):

“The fear for the different is instinctive, caused by the unfamiliarity with those who do not have the physical characteristics of their own kind and are based on the sensitive immediacy of sight, hearing and smell: the color of the skin, but also the incomprehensible language, gestures, nutrition. To this “sensitive” fear are added other fears mediated, including the fear for the loss of work (the immigrant as a potential competitor), personal security (the immigrant as a possible aggressor), economic security (the immigrant as recipient of state subsidies), existential tranquility (the immigrant as an importun, the crook or the thief), health (the immigrant as the bearer of contagious diseases)”.

The fear of the different, as a non-familiar element, is defined by Freud with the “perturbing” term (1917 – 1923, p. 82):

“What is disturbing is that sort of scary that goes back to what we have known for a long time, to what we are familiar with (...) The German word *unheimlich* (uncanny) is evidently the antithesis of *heimlich* (comfortable, quiet, from *Heim*, house), *heimisch* (native country), and therefore familiar, habitual, and it is obvious to deduce that, if something provokes fright is precisely because it is not known and familiar”.

The fear of invasion, which sees the immigrant as a possible threat of disruption of what is patriotic, familiar and that we know, is an element identified in the writers’ works. The immigrant creates a kind of disruption to the local population that sees in him a constant threat. We read in *Cartongesso* (2014):

“The lads can not stand the idea that someone, in times of economic crisis, blacks and Southerners, Chinese and Communists, Moroccans, illegal immigrants and Gypsies, Roma and Rumanians, can violently deprive them of their property, their occluding private property, for other laboriously and gloriously deserved on the other hand painstakingly and gloriously deserved to the sound of hard mess, hellish blas-

phemy, waking up from five, calluses on the gods, back bending, black in nails, save on the materials, pull up everything, bury the shards in the garden, zento (100) employees in black, zero holidays, correct tax evasion, wife-servant, a prosecco a day, masters at our house, no politics, no state, no bureaucracy, no school, no culture, nothing at all, first the Venetian, working, doing so”.

Maino comments in the interview:

“With the change in political governments, the orientation of priorities also changes, for example on political asylums and immigration. One thinks: “let’s pretend that you do not exist, that you are invisible” and if you are invisible soon you will do crimes, because if you can not work legally, you will steal and then create a vicious circle then new needs to make new prisons, etc. It’s all crazy, irrational. Here we have the biggest scandal in Republican Italy, the “Mose” scandal, until today; one hundred billion euros stolen from the state, public money. And the two great Venetian banks have failed with two hundred thousand destroyed savers who have lost everything, all Venetian. The savings of the fathers, of the little fathers, burned forever. And those four scammers is not that they were in the ships of immigrants, they are “typical product of the territory”. It is not that they came with the boats, but the boats are the problem, not them. We do not have the cultural tools and the training to understand that this is not a problem; the problem is ourselves, that we have renounced the past, renounced fathers, memory, values and therefore we can not but be disoriented. And what we do: cin cin with Prosecco.” (Maino, interview to the author, Mestre, 19-09-2018).

The individual is afraid of losing what, with hard work and years of sacrifice he has obtained for himself and his family. “*Paroni a casa nostra*”, “first the Veneto”; sentences that indicate the hierarchy of things: *it’s all mine, it’s all ours*, writes Maino. In all this, the difference is a threat, a disturbing element that, with its presence, can initiate a process that can change reality, as it has always been known. The immigrant is somehow marginalized, excluded from society, is considered a burden for it. In all this, the others recognize each other also through the local dialect, an element that functions as a “filter” to identify the native country. We read in *Cartongesso* (2014):

“They have formalized the “grezzo” as a district language, it has become the reference language, a technical language that only serves, by institutional will, to solve problems of a practical nature: to order to eat and to drink, to ask for the account, to recognize oneself among others similar (...), express a single and obsessive personal consideration that however, with the passage of time, has become the most important fact: the Negroes, the clandestine Negroes and, in general, the foreigners of every race and color who do not speak the “grezzo”

and they do not recognize the fact that the life of the community of the new ethnic guest house in the Veneto region is made to assert itself only with the “grezzo”, they must be eliminated, or better, used as objects of production and for production, until this happens. Negroes not talking the “grezzo” can not integrate and aspire to some improvement of lifestyle.”

Trevisan, on the other hand, mentions a great perplexity towards the immigrant, linked to the reception mechanisms. These mechanisms create frustration, disappointment, elements that are not in favor of anyone and above all of the community hosting the immigrant:

“There is an exchange of mutual knowledge and all this contributes to personal enrichment. Fear is not there but a great perplexity, which tends to manifest itself in raw terms. This perplexity concerns reception mechanisms that are so approximate that they become disturbing. They do not do well to the subjects who undergo it and see it as tolerance. For those who tolerate, it can be a virtue, but for those who are tolerated, it ends up that you take it with yourself in the end. All this I do not know what will turn into. Historically, Italians have been one of the peoples who have also welcomed the Jews; Italy, Denmark and Hungary” (Trevisan, interview to the author, Chiampo, 04-08-2018).

Diversity is intimately linked to ignorance, to imperfect knowledge, but it differs from it for an effect that is not secondary: while lack of knowledge can produce anxiety, in order to provoke fear it is necessary to know, and in what is known, to detect diversity, a detachment from what we consider the norm (Bordoni, 2012). All this is also due to information, that plays a crucial role in this subject.

“There is a lot of fear here, there is also a speculation about fear. We have no particular reason to be afraid, except for the economic one; yet we are constantly afraid. Here there is an enormous responsibility of information, of the world of communication since we live in an increasingly competitive world because everyone is in difficulty, there is a constant anxiety-producing bass drum that acts on everyone. The responsibility of information, of amplifying certain news, of handling them badly, of always proposing them in the most alarming way possible, of being non-educators always, and never making a social part is enormous. Veneto is a commodity, a daily bread. Some political parties have made fear their main lever of consensus and it works. It is very widespread. There are no reasons for it, but there is” (Bugaro, interview to the author, Padova, 28-06-2018).

Words take on a very important role in this context. The lack of knowledge to understand how equal-different an immigrant is, together with the work of the sources of information, construct an image that creates hostility within the individual. For writers, the role of communication is fundamental:

“While the words are underestimated, on the other hand they are also hypervalued. It is all linked to communication that obeys other laws for which its task is no longer to communicate. To also have a critical attitude on what we read, it also takes some time, which is not there because everything is compressed. For example, on the question of race” (Trevisan, interview to the author, Chiampo, 04-08-2018).

“Veneto was a land of emigration, of which one went away; even in Chioggia you find basically two surnames. The basic culture of the population was not very high, and it was a Venetian-centric culture without the slightest external influence. At a certain point, immigrants arrived, but at the same time there is politics. How much is politics’ fault in the distorted perception that people have? We, the younger generation, have the opportunity to get to know them better, they are work colleagues for example, but the older generation does not have this possibility. They see them but they do not know them, and they are not aware of how much they can give to our personal growth and open our horizons and how much we can be equal to them. This older generation, however, is a very large electoral pool. So what better than creating a culture of fear and suspicion? In a time of crisis, where you miss work, it is easier to blame immigrants. None of us white though will take the place of those fourteen boys who died in the south picking tomatoes or cleaning industrial plants.

In Germany, the newscasts speak in an 11% of crime facts and the parties that talk about crime arrive at an average of 16% of the votes. In Italy, the newspapers speak in 53% of the crime and we have a government that takes on average 38-40% of the votes, based on this. It is the cultural humus that you build around that brings you to this. Communication is strategically linked to politics. We have an electorate that is based on fake news. We do not know if the media is a mirror of what we are but certainly the media have influenced what we are becoming.” (Tessari, interview to the author, Mira, 08-08-2018).

These are “communication games” of politics, say the writers, who are connected to these processes. The immigrant consists of an element on which political parties are based to draw attention and increase their electors. The media is the tool par excellence to be able to do this. There is a lack of a critical attitude towards the sources of information, a “filter” that is able to distinguish the quality of information. Zolo (2011, p. 76) writes: “The explicit objective is the spread of fear, used by political elites as the main source of electoral consent. In Italy, as indeed all the western countries, a deep sense of insecurity has spread and stabilized. It is also due to the tools of mass communication: from newspapers to television broadcasting, from commercial advertising to the “information revolution” in all its forms. It is a real subliminal “machine of fear”, which aims to support the repressive drives present in society.”

We conclude by quoting the words of Zygmunt Bauman that could illuminate new avenues of approach to this topic and make us reflect on the contribution of this coexistence with diversity and diversity in the life of a country:

“People, in some way, had forgotten as grandparents and great-grandparents had emigrated to Latin America. They had “invaded” Latin America, happy Latin America! Thanks to the influence of Italians that land is now very prosperous and rich, and if you let people from Africa enter, who knows? Perhaps our grandchildren will be happy. Italy could become a richer country than now. But this point of view is not taken into consideration. The stranger is dangerous. Foreigners are dangerous!” (interview to C. Bordoni, 2012).

To be able to convert fear into opportunities for development and evolution would bring good results for the whole community, for both sides: local society and immigrants. A society that is able to adapt quickly to new everyday realities and to translate changes into opportunities for growth, in the end, is the society that will survive and be more successful and richer than before. What eliminates, with time, fear is the openness towards the different, and its vision as an opportunity to become richer, stronger and better. Building “bridges” of communication with the “different” offers us a greater knowledge of it, and knowledge, with time, eliminates fear, contributing to the growth of the individual and of society as a whole. The writers suggest to us the importance of this cohabitation and of the good fruits that we could “gather” during and at the end of this journey.

Society at the therapist’s chair. Conclusions

This work had a twofold objective: on the one hand, we have tried to highlight all the reasons why we believe that the use of the literary work is a useful starting point for a socio-territorial analysis, with particular interest in emotions, analysis that offers multiple stimuli that can illuminate the many possible worlds while, on the other hand, we tried, using the testimonies of writers, both oral and written, to compose the puzzle of the socio-territorial reality of the Italian Northeast. We tried to make a socio-territorial “cut” and to look inside society: emotions, feelings, perceptions of spaces, daily realities and values, through the identified literary works and the stories of writers as users and witnesses of life in these territories. The literary narrative, which presupposes a *homo scribens*, can provide empirical research and theoretical reflections, deep insights into social reality, as Longo suggests (2012), and as we saw in the first chapter. The complex processes that characterize the city today and the global world require flexibility and creativity in our approaches to “reading” space and its relationship with the individual.

We need innovative tools to “read” these complex changes, tools born within the society, from the same society that is under investigation. The writers, in all this, are like reporters, reporting-from-the-front, trying to transmit the emotions and thoughts of a reality that we do not fully know. We have verified, in our analysis that, the transmitted data (emotions, experiences) in these different reports (novels, narrations), by the writers examined, corresponded to each other, and that their sum, composes a socio-territorial diagnosis that we believe it is a useful food-for-thought on how the Italian Northeast society feels today.

The diffused city of the North - East and its shape have imposed a new daily life on the individual, and have formed its character over time. The emotions that are created by this territorial reality do not inspire the sense of community, and affect on the general psychology of the individual. We believe that any transformation intervention of this territory should take into consideration a diagnosis based on “how” the people who live in these places feel.

Dobosz and Federici (2018) suggest that, in order to try to measure the malaise and the well-being of inhabited space, they should also be confronted with feelings, lived feelings, not only with more or less reliable statistics, or with something that must be concretely read, beyond the domain of what is measurable. The study of emotions is becoming increasingly significant to measure the quality of life of a space. The stories and testimonies of the writers are rich in information in this field, and are a key-tool for interpreting their emotions.

The urban environment creates feelings, thoughts and shapes our being. The shape of the city and its “essence” can condition our life and shape our character, unify us to the society or bring us away from it and generate emotions; all this must be known by those who deal with urban studies, to guide their choices and priorities. We know from the field of psychology that the way in which one feels is crucial for his growth and for his contribution to society as a whole. Emotions are significant indicators for measuring the quality of life of the individual in a given place, and literature resources, in this field, could enrich our knowledge but also innovate our studies as well as our solutions for social phenomena.

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